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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7125
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0872
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1707
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4747
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4432
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7963
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5524
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1332
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1360
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0199
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3491
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1310
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 000081

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; EB/CIP/BA
PACOM FOR FPA;
TREASURY FOR OASIA: SCHUN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/04/2018

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ECPS](#) [PGOV](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMESE DEFY REGIME ATTEMPTS TO MONITOR INTERNET
USE

REF: A. 07 RANGOON 718

[1](#)B. 07 RANGOON 1015

RANGOON 00000081 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for Reasons 1.4

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Although the regime in 2006 issued instructions to all cyber cafe owners to monitor and report on internet usage, only 35 percent of cafes follow the regulations. According to industry insiders, the remaining cafes, which service approximately 75 percent of Burma's internet users, refuse to install screen cameras and other monitoring technology. Instead, they allow users to utilize web tunnels to access blocked sites and email providers. The Burmese Government continues to look for and shut down blogs that refer to the September crackdown and recently arrested activist and blogger Nay Phone Latt. Despite GOB restrictions, the Burmese remain willing to defy the authorities, accessing blocked sites and posting political blogs. We should be helping them. End Summary.

Boom in Cyber Cafe Growth

[1](#)2. (C) Due to the high cost of private internet subscriptions, the majority of Burmese people access the internet from cyber cafes (Ref A). The number of internet cafes has increased dramatically in the past five years, from 14 in 2003 to more than 400 by the end of 2007. Most of these cafes are located in Rangoon and Mandalay, with limited access in smaller cities such as Lashio, Taunggyi, and Bagan. According to Burmese law, one must obtain a Public Access Center (PAC) license from either the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPT) or semi-private Myanmar Info-Tech

before opening an internet cafe. However, Credent Technology Director Zaw Naing confirmed that approximately 65 percent of the existing internet cafes operate without proper licenses. Although the GOB has the power to shut down these illegal cafes, to date, cyber cafes without PAC licenses remain open to the public and service more than 200,000 people in Rangoon and Mandalay alone.

Ignoring GOB Restrictions

¶3. (SBU) In 2006, MPT, working through semi-private company Myanmar Info-Tech, issued instructions to all internet cafes to monitor internet usage. According to MPT documents, all internet cafe owners must:

- Register the name, ID card number, address, and phone number of internet users;
- Report to Myanmar Info-Tech at least twice a month internet usage records (including date, time, screen shots, and URLs) for all internet users;
- Maintain backup records of all internet cafe usage;
- Set up cameras to take screen shots every five minutes;
- Ensure that computer monitors are visible;
- Inform all users that web-based emails are prohibited. Only MPT or Myanmar Teleport email accounts may be accessed;
- Ban the use of web tunnel websites and software;
- Inform users that they should not surf websites which are "unsuitable for Burmese culture", including political websites;
- Inform all users that cyber crime activities (hacking, virus distribution, port scanning, etc.) are punishable under Burmese law; and
- Ensure that users are registered before they download information from the internet.

RANGOON 00000081 002.2 OF 003

¶4. (SBU) The GOB does not have the manpower or technology to monitor internet usage. Instead it relies on cafe owners to enforce the stated regulations and inform Myanmar Info-Tech and MPT immediately if they observe any "improper internet usage." However, several cyber cafe owners told us that most internet cafes do not enforce the GOB restrictions, either for political or financial reasons. According to industry insiders, only properly licensed internet cafes ensure that users register. Those cafes are easily recognizable: before one can log on to the computer, he/she must obtain an access code and password by registering their name and address. Once someone logs on to the server with the cafe password, the owner can then monitor usage, saving website data to a CD, which is then given to the regime, a cafe owner explained.

¶5. (C) Wanna More, Executive Director of Myanmar Computer Company, told us that many cafe owners are unwilling to follow MPT regulations (registering and monitoring users) because they do not want to lose customers. Cyber cafe owners in Rangoon and Mandalay faced financial difficulties in September and October when the GOB shut down the internet (Ref B). Now that their customers are returning, owners are unwilling to install high-tech software to trace URL usage or prevent people from using web tunnel programs to access blocked websites.

¶6. (C) Burmese activists who want to blog or write about democracy movements generally avoid registered cyber cafes, Zaw Naing told us. However, they will use them on occasion to show the regime that they are not a threat. While no official figures are available, Zaw Naing estimated that illegal cafes serviced 75 percent more users than registered cafes.

Focusing on Bloggers

¶7. (SBU) The regime, working with internet providers Myanmar Teleport and MPT, continues to search for and shut down blog sites that had posted news and photographs of the brutal crackdown on innocent demonstrators in September. In the past three months, MPT blocked websites such as www.blogspot.com, www.blogger.com, and www.googleblog.com. Only recently has the regime begun to target pro-democracy bloggers. We confirmed that the police on January 30 arrested activist Nay Phone Latt, a.k.a. Nay Myo Kyaw, owner of three illegal cyber cafes and the author of www.nayphonelatt.blogspot.com and www.mogokmedia.blogspot.com. His whereabouts remain unknown.

Comment

¶8. (C) Burma has many laws on the books that are not enforced. Regime incompetence may be the main reason for the lack of enforcement, but we suspect that those willing to defy the authorities have the sympathetic, or for a small fee can purchase, support of the enforcers. Than Shwe, like many other authoritarian rulers, is finding it difficult to block access to the truth in the cyber age. The Burmese are determined to gain access to the truth and to tell about what is happening inside Burma. We should be helping them by offering additional ways to send information, such as setting up internet portals, Wifi, or Wimax service. The more pathways available for information flow, the harder it will be for Than Shwe to block the truth.

RANGOON 00000081 003.2 OF 003

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